



COMMONWEALTH  
SECRETARIAT

# Teachers!

## Are you thinking about teaching abroad?



*Commonwealth Teacher Recruitment Protocol*

# Ten questions to ask b

## 1. *Who is telling you about the opportunity to teach abroad?*

Some job adverts look very attractive, but beware – they may be scams! Research the employer thoroughly on the internet if possible, and be wary of anyone who asks you to send money or identification. To find reliable agencies, ask around among your colleagues, friends and family about teachers who have gone abroad before; check with your teacher union/organisation; and, if the recruiting country has a quality system (such as the UK's Quality Mark) for rating recruitment agencies, see whether the agency recruiting you has earned this recognition.

## 2. *Will you know what to expect from your employer in the recruiting country before you go?*

Some teachers arrive in a new country to find that the actual job, accommodation, pay or contract they are given is not what they were promised. They may even be abused or exploited. Double-check your expectations with the employer, and get confirmation in writing. Some questions to ask them: "Where is the job? What is its level? What subject will I be teaching? What age are the students? What is the salary and will it change? What are the hours of work? Is any money going to be deducted from my salary and for what purposes? What work responsibilities will I have outside the classroom? Who is responsible for obtaining the visa and work permit? Where will I be living? Is it going to be close to my place of work?"

## 3. *Are qualifications assessed before departure?*

Do you know whether your teaching qualification will be recognised in the recruiting country? Many countries (especially in Europe, North America, Australia and New Zealand) have information services which can tell you, although they may charge you for answering your enquiry. Look for information on NARICs (National Academic Recognition Information Centres) and ENICs (European Network of Information Centres) on the internet or in a library.

## 4. *Will you have a written contract before you go?*

Who is the contract with? How long is it for? What would happen if you were forced to break the contract due to circumstances beyond your control (e.g. sickness or death of a family member forcing you to return home)? It is generally better to get as much in writing as possible, as this gives you more protection if there is a problem later.

## 5. *Are your terms and conditions of employment consistent with national teachers of similar status?*

You may arrive to find that you are being paid significantly less than local teachers to do the same job – or, occasionally, significantly more! Try to find out

# efore teaching abroad

what nationals are being paid for the job you will be doing – many governments and agencies publish their pay scales for teachers.

## 6. *Will you work under the labour laws and rules of the recruiting countries?*

Some countries have different rules for different nationalities. Check whether you will have the same level of protection under the law as a national member of staff.

## 7. *Is there a complaints mechanism in the recruiting country?*

Try to find out who to turn to if you need help. Is there a formal way of making a complaint? Teacher unions/organisations may be able to offer advice. Find out about the unions in the recruiting country and the services they can offer, and join a union when you arrive. High Commissions and Embassies are other sources of information.

## 8. *Do you anticipate returning home?*

Check with your current employer what will happen when you return. Will they keep your job for you and recognise your years of service abroad? What happens to your pension while you are away and after your return? Also, ask the recruiting agency/employer abroad what they will do to help your return. What training might you be able to receive when you are abroad which would help your employment prospects when you get back?

## 9. *Have you looked at the total cost of teaching abroad?*

You need to look carefully at all the costs of going abroad, as well as the salary. You need to find out how much tax you will be paying, and remember, many countries require you to pay local taxes or compulsory insurance in addition to income tax. How much will accommodation cost? How much will transport cost between home and work? Will you need to pay to register as a teacher, and how much is union membership? Are you going to be paid in a stable currency? Will you be able to send money home? What will happen to your dependents while you are away? Think about what would happen if something unexpected occurs and you are not around to deal with it.

## 10. *In addition to going abroad, are there other opportunities to consider for short-term professional development?*

Look into all the options. Have you looked into teacher exchange programmes, for example? Talk to your teacher union/association, or someone from your ministry of education or teaching service commission about whether there are schemes under which they would sponsor you for a period of service abroad.

For a variety of reasons, many teachers take advantage of the increasing opportunities to teach in another country. For some, it is because the pay is better; for others, because they want to benefit from the experience of living, working and learning in a different culture.

For many teachers the experience is a positive one. But for some, things can go wrong. To minimise the chances of this, it's best to get as much information as you can before you go.

Whatever your reason for thinking about teaching abroad, this leaflet can help you to inform yourself about the true advantages and disadvantages. It contains ten questions you should ask before teaching abroad, and points you in the direction of further sources of information. Bear in mind that different countries have different information available, so not all your questions may be answered. But the more information you can get, the better.

One of the aims of the Commonwealth Teacher Recruitment Protocol is to protect the rights of teachers who migrate internationally. More information can be found at [www.thecommonwealth.org/education](http://www.thecommonwealth.org/education).

This leaflet is based on the article "Teachers, Ask 10 Questions Before Teaching Abroad" by Dr Kimberly Ochs, which appeared in the December 2010 issue of the IICBA Newsletter. For more details see [www.unesco-icba.org](http://www.unesco-icba.org).

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